

# SANDPIPER

A newsletter for VIPs. Sandy Hook/Gateway National Recreation Area  
Editor: Norma Kay



March 2005

## MICHAEL'S COLUMN

By: Michael Thomas, VIP Coordinator

Hello Volunteers! Spring is rapidly approaching and before we know it, there will be hundreds of visitors at Sandy Hook. It has been a busy winter with a lot happening. First let me congratulate Richard Wells, former Deputy Superintendent of Sandy Hook, who is now our new full-time Superintendent.

All projects generally benefit Sandy Hook, but a few directly benefit volunteers. Rehabilitation of the Keepers Quarters as offices for the Sandy Hook Foundation and NJ Lighthouse Society and as a NJ Lighthouse Museum is moving forward. Interior rehabilitation of the Keepers Quarters is likely to begin within the next 30 days with installation of fire suppression and upgrades to the electrical system. This \$450,000 project is funded entirely by the Sandy Hook Foundation and being managed by NPS Park Maintenance. In addition, development of the exhibit plan for the NJ Lighthouse Museum that will be housed on the first floor of the building has begun. The \$20,000 design project is funded by the NJ Lighthouse Society and is being developed jointly with NPS Interpretation.

A lot of work has been done to Battery Gunnison; the old roll-up doors have been replaced as well as other iron gates and doors. Our partner volunteer organization, The Army Ground Forces Association is jumping for glee! They have also done an amazing amount of work on the interior, the guns, and they are now working on rehabilitating the old shell lifts.

### NIKE AJAX MISSILES ARRIVE AT SANDY HOOK

By: Thomas Hoffman, Park Historian

Early on the morning of Thursday, February 3<sup>rd</sup>, a large truck pulled into the South Maintenance Area at Sandy Hook to deliver something from this site's historic past: two Nike Ajax Missiles! The South Maintenance Area was originally a Nike Missile Launch Area where, from 1954 to 1974. During the Cold War Era, Nike air defense missiles stood ready 24/7 to defend the New Jersey-New York Metropolitan Area from

Check them out on Coastal Defenses Day noon-4:00pm on Sunday May 22, when Battery Gunnison will be open to the public. Also, an engineering report dealing with rehabilitation and stabilization of Battery Gunnison, Battery Potter and the Sandy Hook Mortar Battery is in draft. When final, we will be able to determine a scope of work for the batteries and request funding.

We would like to thank the volunteers who contributed to the Toys for Tots program this last Christmas. It was a great success. I'm sure there were lots of very happy kids who otherwise would not have had as good a holiday had it not been for the generosity of our volunteers.

The Park is doing its spring interpretive volunteer training for new volunteers on **Saturday March 19<sup>th</sup> 9:30am to Noon**. If you are not very familiar with Sandy Hook or are a current volunteer and want to refresh your Sandy Hook knowledge, you are invited. If you plan to attend, please call Connie Witherby at 732 872-5949. The training will start at the Sandy Hook Visitor Center. If you are a new volunteer and planning on volunteering for the NJ Lighthouse Society call Al Smith at 856 546-7810 or e-mail him at [cmagsmith@juno.com](mailto:cmagsmith@juno.com).

If you have any other comments or questions, call me, Michael Thomas, at 732-872-5959 or e-mail me at [mike\\_thomas@nps.gov](mailto:mike_thomas@nps.gov).

an enemy air attack. The first version of this anti-aircraft missile was the Nike Ajax. With a range of over 30 miles, an altitude of 60,000 feet, and a speed of mach 2.3, this two-stage, 32.6-foot long missile carrying 3 high-explosive warheads could intercept and destroy hostile warplanes far out over the Atlantic Ocean before they reached the United States.

Nike Ajax Missiles were at the Sandy Hook Launch Area from 1954 to 1959, when the U.S. Army Air Defense Command started phasing larger and faster Nike Hercules Missiles into service nationwide. Since Nike Ajax Missiles were replaced years ago, they are today rare historic artifacts that you don't often find. In an effort to bring back what once was here, Sandy Hook Museum Curator Mary Rasa spent time researching military museums in the United States in an effort to find both Nike Ajax and Hercules Missiles that might be available for loan or donation. Mary's efforts paid off when she found that 2 Nike Ajax Missiles, and also a Nike Hercules Missile AND its launcher, were available at the Patrick Air Force Base Museum in Florida.

Because of their size, the two Nike Ajax Missiles, their boosters and launch rails had to be disassembled to fit on the truck. Upon arrival at Sandy Hook they were carefully and skillfully off-loaded by the Sandy Hook Maintenance Staff (THANK YOU, GUYS!) and stored in a secure location. Like the Nike Ajax Missile and launcher acquired a few years ago that is now displayed opposite the launcher area, these Nike Ajax Missiles will be restored by the SHU Maintenance staff in the near future. Meanwhile, a return trip is planned to get that Nike Hercules Missile and launcher moved up here to Sandy Hook so...stay tuned!



#### **“MARY HAD A LITTLE LAMB....”**

**By: Thomas Hoffman, Park Historian**

In case you haven't heard, Mary Rasa, Museum Curator at Sandy Hook, and her husband Anthony recently became new parents. On November 19, 2004, they proudly welcomed into the world their first child, Christina Maria Rasa, weighing in at an even 7 lbs. Although Mary has been on leave since November, she and her baby have been seen around Fort Hancock from time to time whenever the weather is mild. Recently, at park headquarters, Mary walked in carrying her daughter, who was bundled up in one-piece jump suit and had her back to me. As I looked at the tiny little figure, in her woolly

looking suit with hood that had two little bumps on top that resembled little ears, I could not help but say "What have you have got there, a little teddy bear?" Mary's quick response was classic: "No, not a teddy bear! Doesn't she look like a little lamb?" You know, like 'Mary had a little lamb?' With that said, Mary slowly turned Christina Maria around in her arms, and I now saw an adorable little baby girl's face peering at me. I couldn't agree more, Mary does have a very pretty little lamb! Congratulations Mary & Anthony!

#### **GOOD LUCK TO CAROL WEIDELE**

**By: Constance Witherby, Acting Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources**

Soon we will be losing Carol Weidele, one of our most valuable volunteers, as she moves on to new endeavors first in Florida then hopefully, onto the wild west. Carol has volunteered at Sandy Hook since 1989 and she logged a total of 1133 hours, conducting interpretive programs and doing cultural resource activities. The park has really benefited from her varied projects. She spent hundreds of hours at History House, meeting and greeting our visitors, and bringing to life what it was like for US Army Officers and their families to be stationed here from turn of the 19th century to the Cold War era. Carol was also one of the key decorators for the World War

II Christmas Program at History House. Carol did the decorative wall finishing in the first floor of History House, using historic colors and wall painting techniques. For years she managed the gardens at History House and in front of the Fort Hancock Museum doing the research to make sure the plantings represented the kinds of flowers that were appropriate to Fort Hancock in the 1930s and 40s. Her love of Sandy Hook and Fort Hancock has been inspiring to all of us, and we will miss her and her enthusiasm. We wish Carol the best of luck in her new adventures, and know that she is always welcome here.

## **CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

### ***Sandy Hook Lighthouse***

**Lighthouse: Reopens for season on April 2nd**

**Weekends, noon to 4:30 p.m.**

**Monday, May 30, noon to 4:30 p.m.**

### ***Battery Potter***

**Weekends in April and May, 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.**

Explore Sandy Hook's oldest gun battery.

### ***Nike Missile Radar Site***

**Horseshoe Cove parking area**

**Sundays, April 10 and 24 , May 8 and 22, 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.**

**Saturdays, April 16 and 30, May 14 and 28, 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.**

Tour the site where radar guided supersonic Nike Missiles during the Cold War.

### ***Night Prowl***

**Sandy Hook Visitor Center**

**Saturday, March 12 at 7 p.m.**

Bring a flashlight on this after dark walk on Sandy Hook beaches or trails.

### ***Waterfowl Walk***

**Sandy Hook Visitor Center**

**Saturday, March 19 at 9 a.m.**

Join a naturalist from the New Jersey Audubon Society to search for ducks, geese, and early migrants.

Bring binoculars.

### ***Going Bunkers***

**Fort Hancock Museum**

**Sunday, March 20 at 2 p.m.**

Discover the role of Sandy Hook in New York Harbor defenses.

Reservations required: 732-872-5970

### ***Vernal Equinox Night Shorewalk***

**Guardian Park, Fort Hancock**

**Monday, March 21 at 7 p.m.**

Join the American Littoral Society for a two-hour after dark hike on the beach. Free and open to the public. Bring a flashlight. Call 732-291-0055 if you have any questions.

## **SAFETY FIRST**

**“It is better to lose one minute in life... than to lose life in a minute.”**

#### SANDY HOOK VOLUNTEER CONTACTS

- Organized Youth Group Activities (Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts, etc.): Jean MacArthur 732-872-5936
- Beach Cleanup, Dune Grass Planting: Bruce Lane 732-872-5931
- Endangered Species Monitoring: Jean MacArthur: 732-872-5936
- Interpretive Activities (tour guides, visitor assistants): Connie Witherby 732-872-5949
- Maintenance Activities (electrician, plumber, carpenter, etc.): Michael Thomas 732-872-5959
- Cultural Resource Activities (curatorial, internships, gun battery cleanups, etc.): Mary Rasa 732-872-5953
- Administration (filing, office management): Michael Thomas 732-872-5959
- Volunteerism in other Gateway Units: Marisol Soto 718-354-4564
- Sandy Hook Park Partners:
  - Sandy Hook Foundation: Betsy Barrett 732-291-7733
  - New Jersey Lighthouse Society: Tom Lavery 732-872-1814
  - Clean Ocean Action: Cindy Zipf 732-872-0111
  - New Jersey Audubon/ Sandy Hook Bird Observatory: 732-872-2500
  - Monmouth County Audubon: 732-872-2473
  - Army Ground Forces Association: Mike Murray: 201-444-2024

*SANDPIPER* a Newsletter for VIPs

National Park Service  
Sandy Hook  
Gateway National Recreation Area  
P.O. Box 530  
Fort Hancock, New Jersey 07732



#### EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.